

message before Meadowland eviction Jan 2004

>MAKE IT OUR FINEST HOUR<

There is a coalition building in the Travellers' campaign, in the sense of a broad spectrum of people who are now working together for the same aims - with more cohesion than ever before, thanks partly to electronic communications. We are simply better able to keep in touch, in what is sometimes a rapidly changing situation.

At 8 am on Monday, January 26, the same contractors as hired by Nuneaton Council for the attempted Bulkington eviction will come to attempt the eviction of Jim McCann and 30 others, including children going to school. I believe this has an element of racism in it, a racism hiding behind planning regulations. As those in the know will tell you, Mrs Christine Lyons (whom I expect to meet today) "has it in" for the Travellers and has been hounding some people for years.

At the foundation meeting of the Traveller Law Reform Coalition, I put forward a resolution saying one of our aims must be "to stop ethnic cleansing". It was passed unanimously. I believe, whatever the complexities of the legal situation, the shadow of a wish to "get rid of the Gypsies" looms behind the actions at Woodside, at Bulkington and now at Cranham Road, Little Waltham. I believe the time has come to draw a line in the sand and stop, by whatever non-violent means we can think up, this ugly crime against humanity.

I understand that the TLRC would put its funding in jeopardy by openly supporting opposition to this eviction (it was for this reason that TERF at a special general meeting voted not to apply for charity status but to remain free to act as needed. Incidentally, our funding comes from Travellers rather than outside bodies which may have their own "controlling" agenda). In my brief "coalition" message, I was stating that within this informal coalition each of us is making the contribution we feel able, and we must respect each other for this. Respect the limits. Das pativ. Some of us choose to work at the "front", others are labouring in the rear areas. Equally valid, equally needed.

I hope that more people will decide to come to Cranham Road - either simply to be present and witness and take part in a lawful, peaceful protest out on the road - or to be inside the caravan park, within the perimeter of ditches and barricades and in effect put their bodies on the line.

One deciding element at Bulkington was that 70 Travellers (and five supporters) gathered out on the road and walked in a body right up to the police lines and the bailiffs, carrying a long banner "Stop ethnic cleansing". It was this disciplined advance - together with the blazing barricades and ditches - which convinced the senior

officer present to advise Nuneaton Council officials to call off the eviction or face the possibility of a "serious riot". We had no intention of causing a riot - just the opposite. But the possibility of trouble under the provocation of the contractors trying to remove peoples' homes by brutal force was in the air. Johnny Lee's wife Leanna practised, while I was with her, hauling her three small daughters up onto the roof of her trailer through the light-hatch. Resistance was determined and inspired and desperate.

Because it follows so closely on Bulkington, events at Cranham Road are going to draw a huge amount of media attention. I'm not content to think, well, win or loose, the publicity will help forward the cause. Along with Jim McCann, whom I have known since 1968, I want to STOP this senseless eviction, this indecent act. I went to France with Jimmy McCann - and the late and great Tommy Doherty - on the first International Roma Committee delegation to Strasbourg back in 1969. It has been a long road and I intend to stand with my friend until we reach the end of it.

Succeed and the message will go out to all councils that hiring the nasty thugs of this company which specializes in "removal" of Travellers is a waste of time and money. Useless. And the ball will be placed in the court of the Government, to do something POSITIVE to solve these issues, as Kevin McNamara said so clearly in Parliament on Monday.

Come then - this is our hour. Let's make it our finest.

No one has to come to Cranham as a member of the TLRC (I am a member myself).

Just wear another "hat" for the occasion - or a scarf around the face, as a number of Travellers did at Bulkington. We will be gathering at Cranham Road on Sunday (Jan 25)- Jim McCann would like people, even those who have not made up their minds, to pay a visit on that day and see for themselves what he is fighting for.

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